

December 2004

Revising Minimum Basic Admission Standards

Background

- Washington state law requires the Higher Education Coordinating Board to define minimum freshman admission standards for Washington's public four-year colleges and universities.
- The vast majority of prospective freshmen – residents and non-residents, citizens and international students, students from public, private or home schools – must meet the minimum basic admission standards to enter any of the state's four-year colleges and universities. The colleges and universities can still admit a small number of freshmen who demonstrate college readiness by alternative means.
- The current minimum standards for freshman admission have not been substantially revised since 1988.
- The higher education community has reached broad agreement that the current admission standards are inadequate and that more rigorous preparation is required for freshmen entering the state's colleges and universities.
- On December 10, Higher Education Coordinating Board directed its staff to publicize the recommended minimum admission changes, conduct a public comment process, and prepare final proposed standards for consideration and possible adoption by the board in mid-2005.

Key changes to the current standards would:

- **Increase the high school mathematics requirement.** Currently, students must complete three years of math in high school — algebra 1, geometry, and algebra 2 or integrated math 1, 2 and 3. This proposal would require additional math from students in one of two ways:
 - Successful completion of math through Intermediate Algebra (or Integrated Math III) and a year of elective math, algebra-based science or statistics in the final year of high school; or
 - Successful completion of math through pre-calculus.

- **Revise the high school science requirement.** Currently, students are required to take two years of science, of which one year must be laboratory-based. The proposal would require two years of laboratory-based science, of which one year would require the student to understand and use algebra. This change was approved by the board for entering college freshmen in 2010. This proposal would advance that requirement to entering freshmen in 2008.
- **Require students in each year of high school to take at least three college preparatory courses that last for the entire school year.** Students would have the option of taking additional year-long courses.
- **Eliminate the statewide college Admission Index,** a formulaic scoring and ranking system used to evaluate high school graduates based on their cumulative grade point averages and scores on the SAT or ACT college entrance exams. However, the proposal would leave intact the requirements that students achieve at least a 2.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale, and that they submit college test scores (SAT or ACT) to be considered for admission.

Certain Aspects of the College Admission Process will Remain Intact

- **Colleges and universities would retain their current flexibility in two important ways.** They could designate additional requirements for admission beyond the basic standards set forth by the board. And, they could continue to admit some students who do not meet the minimum requirements, but who have otherwise made a compelling case that they are ready to succeed in college study. The number of students who may be admitted under special consideration would remain limited to 15 percent of each freshman class.
- **Simply meeting the new minimum requirements would NOT guarantee students admission to any of the state's public four-year institutions.** Colleges and universities make admission decisions based on a variety of economic, demographic, and institutional factors – many of which change every year. The new minimum standards would tell students that, if they meet the requirements, they are likely to be ready for college-level work and have a reasonable opportunity of being admitted to one of the state's public four-year institutions. As the college admission process becomes more competitive, certain students who meet the *minimum* standards may not be admitted to their first-choice institutions.

If, after a period of public review and comment, the board ultimately approves these changes or some modification of them, HECB staff would work vigorously to communicate the new requirements to students, parents and schools in the years leading up to their implementation, and for as long as they remain in effect.

A public comment period on the proposed new admission standards is scheduled for March, April and May 2005. The HECB will not take final action on the proposed new standards until June 2005 at the earliest.

If adopted, the new higher standards would apply to students entering college in fall 2008 and thereafter.

Minimum Freshman Admission Standards for Students Entering College in Fall 2008 and Thereafter

Goals of the minimum basic admission standards are to ensure that:

- Freshmen selected to enroll at the state's public four-year colleges and universities are ready to succeed academically and earn bachelor's degrees;
- The amount of remedial instruction required for recent high school graduates is minimized;
- Universities recognize that experiences and activities beyond academic achievement can contribute to a successful college application; and
- Students and families understand that completion of a rigorous curriculum in high school is critically important to prepare for success in college.

	Current Minimum Standards	Proposed Standards Effective Summer 2008
Academic Distribution Requirements		Students must take a minimum of 3 year-long academic courses (core and/or other rigorous courses beyond core) each year of high school, including the senior year. Students are encouraged to take additional or advanced academic coursework when available.
<i>English</i>	4 years , including 3 years of literature and composition.	No change.
<i>Mathematics</i>	3 years , including algebra, geometry and advanced mathematics.	Students must complete one of the following math options: (1) successful completion of math through Intermediate Algebra (or Integrated Math III) and a year of elective math, algebra-based science or statistics in the final year of high school; OR, (2) successful completion of math through pre-calculus.
<i>Social Science</i>	3 years.	No change.
<i>Science</i>	2 years , including one year of laboratory science (the equivalent of biology, chemistry, physics, or principles of technology). Note: Students applying for college freshman admission beginning in fall 2010 must have completed two years of laboratory science, including one year of algebra-based biology, chemistry or physics.	2 years of laboratory science , including one year of algebra-based biology, chemistry or physics.
<i>Foreign Language</i>	2 years of the same foreign language, Native American language, or American Sign language.	No change.
<i>Arts</i>	1 year of fine, visual or performing arts or electives from any of the other required subjects.	No change.

**Minimum Freshman Admission Standards for
Students Entering College in 2008 and Thereafter**
(continued)

	Current Minimum Standards	Proposed Standards Effective Summer 2008
Minimum Grade Point Average	Minimum unweighted cumulative Grade Point Average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale.	No change.
Admission Index (Each student receives a score based on grade point average and college admission test scores.)	Achieve a minimum score of at least 13 at Central, Eastern and Western Washington universities and The Evergreen State College, and at least 28 at Washington State University and the University of Washington.	Eliminate.
Required tests	SAT or ACT	SAT or ACT. Students unable to provide standardized test scores may petition the institution for a waiver. International students are not required to provide test scores. No more than 5 percent of the new freshmen enrolled annually at each institution may receive waivers from this requirement. Note: Students who pass all sections of the WASL will be determined to have completed the first two years of high school core requirements in English and mathematics.
Comprehensive Review	Institutions may admit students who do not meet the minimum standards by considering such non-academic characteristics as a personal essay, community activities, personal circumstances or special talents. No more than 15 percent of new freshmen at each institution may be admitted through this alternative process.	No change.